Winning Tomorrow's Battles Today

Reinvigorating maneuver warfare in the 2d Marine Division by MajGen David Furness

"Open warfare requires elastic tactics, swift maneuvers, and decisive action."

—Infantry in Battle, 1939¹

"The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means of accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. That advantage may be psychological, technological, or temporal as well as spatial." —MCDP 1²

he Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy was born and adopted in the 1980s. In the shadow of the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps searched for a new way to fight in large-scale, stateon-state conflicts—particularly against the ever-present Soviet threat. Today, America's large-scale involvement in the Global War on Terrorism is dwindling, while peer threats are becoming increasingly assertive in a rapidly changing and uncertain world. To meet these threats, 2d Marine Division has renewed its focus on maneuver warfare. We argue this shift is equally prudent today as when the Division—under then-MajGen Alfred Gray-first led the Marine Corps in adopting maneuver warfare in the early 1980s. In the "Follow Me" Division, our intent is to accomplish two goals: to operationalize maneuver warfare across the Division and prepare our Marines and Sailors to conduct major combat operations (MCO) against a peer competitor.

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Our maneuver warfare philosophy is the basis for which we train and educate the Marines and Sailors for MCO against a peer competitor and prepare commanders and their staffs to fight the Division in a communications-denied or degraded environment. We will first address maneuver warfare and MCDP 1, Warfighting, to provide a point of reference for our understanding of maneuver warfare and its application in leading the Division.

According to MCDP 1,

Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope.³

It further states how "[t]he aim is to render the enemy incapable of resisting effectively by shattering his moral, mental, and physical cohesion-his ability to fight as an effective, coor-dinated whole."⁴ Both the definition and the expanded explanation imply a systemic approach to defeating the enemy by creating and widening the gap between his perception and the reality of the situation. This gap inhibits effective decision making while his reactions become progressively more inadequate for the situation. The enemy becomes an active participant in his own demise. Continuing its description of maneuver warfare, MCDP 1 says:

> This is not to imply that firepower is unimportant ... Nor do we mean to imply that we will pass up the opportunity to physically destroy the enemy. We will concentrate fires and forces at decisive points to destroy enemy elements when the opportunity presents itself and when it fits our larger purposes.⁵

Proficiency in techniques and procedures, including the use of combined arms down the small unit level, must be present in any organization employing maneuver warfare. *MCDP 1* goes on to describe the essential components of a maneuver warfare mindset: initiative and boldness in decision making and action; trust, familiarity, and cooperation between leaders and led that is empowered by mission-type orders; discipline; shared understanding or implicit communication; and the effective use of combined arms. This understanding of maneuver warfare philosophy has led us to ask two questions as a Division:

- How do we inculcate this mindset into our Marines, Sailors, and units as they prepare to conduct MCO?
- How do we infuse this same mindset into the way we lead and fight the Division?

The answer to the first question lies in deliberately focusing on training and educating the Division to conduct MCO against a peer adversary. *MCDP 1* states,

All commanders should consider the professional development of their subordinates a principle responsibility of command ... *Commanders should see the development of their subordinates as a direct reflection on themselves.*"⁶

We take this responsibility seriously and expect all of our leaders from the fire team to the division level to do the same. Our officers and SNCOs will be judged by the quality of their NCOs and small unit leaders. We think that training and education are *the* critical components of professional development. In the most simplified form, we conduct training to gain proficiency in the science of war: the techniques and procedures that will be required of us to perform the tasks necessary to succeed in combat. To complement training, we educate to improve our ability to creatively apply these techniques and procedures within a given context through tactics—also known as the art of war. To maximize the efficacy of both training and education, we must use them in a mutually reinforcing fashion. In 2d Marine Division, the initial aim point for our focus on training and education is our rifle squads.

We firmly argue that the success of the Division in combat will hinge on the performance of our 243 rifle squads. Without their ability to consistently prevail at the point of friction along with a mastery of continuing actions—the science—all the technical and tactical skills, brilliant staff work, and technological capabilities that are brought to bear will be largely irrelevant.⁷ To that end, empowering our NCOs is critical to preparing for combat. The ability to rapidly conduct combined arms battle drills that generate both destructive effects and produce tempo against a peer adversary, coupled with appropriate continuing actions to maintain pressure and tempo, is grounded in individual and unit discipline that has been the hallmark of the Corps since its inception. These traits, habits of thought and action, must be repeatedly practiced and instilled at home station prior to making contact with the enemy, especially as the number of Marines with recent combat experience decreases. Furthermore, we must train our leaders as critical thinkers and problem solvers with a bias for action while simultaneously educating them to know how to creatively apply those possible solutions-the art. Similarly, squad leaders must be conditioned to adapt, update, or modify battle drills to new environments without prompting. Muscle memory and comfort levels invite small unit leaders to "run the same play" even when circumstances have changed. Just as I expect all our small unit leaders to be comfortable facing common tactical situations to take timely and effective actions every time, I want them equally accustomed to recognizing changing or unusual circumstances and applying creative thought without prompting to achieve success. To this end, the Division is aggressively reemphasizing basic leadership and discipline standards that help foster vigilance and attention to detail from its small unit leaders.

The Division's Basic Daily Routine policy letter released in April 2019 and quarterly Leadership and Discipline Stand Downs aim to generate what college football coach Nick Saban calls a "culture of excellence." He establishes uncompromising standards for his team and expects player to player enforcement of the standards. Our consistent and deliberate focus on leadership and discipline is intended to develop a similar culture of excellence by establishing a shared understanding of Marine Corps standards and providing those small unit leaders "in the trenches" with the tools to enforce these standards. This culture of excellence and peer accountability ultimately creates mutual trust, cohesion, familiarity, and implicit communication between

the leader and the led at the small unit level. Without strong and empowered small unit leaders, a culture of excellence slowly devolves into a culture of "good enough."

The stand downs reinforce established standards with the Division's Marines and Sailors in an effort to cultivate "[t]he self-discipline to accomplish the mission with minimal supervision and to act always in accord with the larger intent."8 Equally as important, they empower small unit leaders—our key strength—by teaching them to enforce the standards through clearly communicated expectations, engaged leadership, counseling, mentoring, and continuing actions as well as affording them the opportunity to make leadership decisions. This starts with small unit leaders getting to know their Marines better-knowing them as a person first and understanding their personal aspirations and goals-and continues in tactical training to build the mutual understanding, trust, and cohesion that underscores the ability to employ mission command. We expect these small unit leaders to take their refocused attention to detail and the leadership lessons learned from the stand downs and apply them as they lead their Marines daily.

In addition to our focus on leadership and discipline, the Division has implemented several initiatives to train, educate, and empower small units and their leadership. Division Bulletin 3502, titled "Policy for the Professional Development and Education of Enlisted Marines for Small Unit Leaders," (June 2019), holds commanders accountable for getting Marines to their MOS advanced schools. These schools enable the professional development of our Marines and Sailors at both the individual and small unit leader level. Division Bulletin 3502 is a concrete example of the Division's dedication to the professional development of our Marines and Sailors. The Division is also aggressively targeting top performing infantry Marines to laterally move into the Squad Leader Development Program. In partnership with the School of Infantry-East, the Division is participating in a high performance track experiment.

Last winter, the Division selected 26 junior Marines to participate in the high performance track experiment. The experiment features an instructional cadre dedicated to facilitating experiential and transformative learning through deliberate preparation and training of high potential junior Marines. This involves individual decisionmaking skills through the completion of Infantry Small Unit Leaders Course. This effort provides our junior leaders with a defined educational track and the Division with a phenomenal return on investment in the improved knowledge, proficiency, and maturity of its squad leaders. Lastly, the Division implemented a competition order that includes the super squad competition, separate battalion competitions, as well as individual competitions—including the machine gun, mortar, grenadier, anti-armor, corpsman, and expert infantry competitions. These competitions are challenging and capitalize on the competitive nature of Marines. They require superb levels of physical fitness, mastery of infantry weapons systems, and brilliance in the tactics, techniques, and procedures that drive small unit success in combat as well as encourage both individuals and small units to raise their game to achieve success. In calendar year 2020, we are expanding the competition order to include additional MOSs throughout the Division and decision-making focused competitions at the squad through company level. Winners gain recognition through ceremonies and awards. In turn, these Marines and Sailors reward the Division with increased battlefield prowess and lethality in our small units.

We have also implemented a feedback mechanism through creating a Division Sergeant's Council and a Captain's Council that meet monthly with the Sergeant Major, Command Master Chief, Division Gunner, and me. These councils provide an opportunity for our small unit leaders to help shape Division initiatives going forward through frank, honest, and realtime feedback. Of note, it was the Sergeant's Council that first identified the shortfalls in discipline throughout the Division and was the impetus behind the creation of the aforementioned Basic Daily Routine policy letter in April 2019. The policy letter provided a daily framework for the reestablishment of better small unit leadership and discipline throughout the 2d Marine Division. The Division's deliberate focus on training and educating our 243 rifle squads enables initiatives that promote improvements to training and education at the company level and above.

To harness the excellence generated at the small unit level, we need to also focus on the second half of the challenge: infusing the maneuver warfare mindset into how the Division is led. In concert with the focus on small unit training and education, we turned our attention to Division-level leadership training and education. The Division has implemented a robust program of professional military education (PME) aimed at improving leaders' tactical proficiency and decision making from the company level up to the Division staff. These leaders are then expected to take the knowledge gained and develop enhanced training and education for their subordinate leaders. Currently, our topics have been tactically-focused and ranged from building and fighting a regimental defense-in-depth and the execution of the orders process in a time competitive environment to a Division Attack PME on the Battle of 73 Easting during Operation DESERT STORM, which included a battle study and planning scenario conducted by the former director of the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, Dr. Kevin Benson (COL, USA(Ret).9 Another PME led by battalion commanders from within the Division covered training and education techniques such as planning and conducting forceon-force free-play training. Each of the tactically focused events has included a scenario-based exercise problem that included time competitive planning and wargaming. In line with the 38th Commandant's Planning Guidance, we wargame unit solutions to our tactical problems to force commanders and staffs to make and execute decisions against a free-thinking enemy-thereby gaining immediate feedback and important repetitions in decision making. Af-

ter each wargame, participants conduct on-the-spot critiques to solidify lessons learned before displacing to the "Follow Me" bar for more informal discussions, camaraderie, and team building. Intermingled with these tactically focused topics are guest speakers, such as MG Robert Scales, USA(Ret) who discussed the potential characteristics of future conflicts and adversaries, and former Marine Maj John Schmitt, the author of MCDP 1, who walked the Division's leaders through his Recognitional Planning Process,¹⁰ an alternative approach to the deliberate planning of the Marine Corps Planning Process. Future guests include: former Commandant Gen Alfred Gray, who will lead a discussion on maneuver warfare in December 2019; Dr. Gordon Rudd from the Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting to present on Pacific campaigns of WWII; and Williamson Murray, a world-renowned historian, to discuss technological innovation during the inter-war years. This PME program increases the commanders' and staffs' ability to orient on problems as well as decisively develop and execute solutions in the context of both current and potential future threats.

Through these PMEs, the Division is also building necessary unit cohesion and trust because commanders at multiple echelons are observing how the commanders around them weigh important data points and then make decisions despite limited information. In turn, these commanders are expected to teach the lessons they have learned to their subordinate commanders and leaders down to the squad leader. These observations and interactions allow commanders to infer the decisions of subordinate, adjacent, and higher commanders when they are not present. I liken this effect to a fast break in basketball: A well-trained basketball team on a fast break does not have to look for the ball; they have total confidence in one another to be in the right positions to make a play. This trust between members of the team enables speed, and our speed—the quick decisions, coupled with the decisive action of our rapid and accurate employment of all of our weapons systems-is what will overwhelm our adversaries. For this reason, any break in trust must be ruthlessly and immediately sanctioned. The late Col John Boyd, USAF(Ret) described the effects that this fast break analogy has on an opponent in his renowned *Patterns of Conflict Brief*:

> Many of you people have seen a basketball game ... you ever notice when one team starts getting ahead of the other ... they come unglued ... What do they do? First thing, they call time out so they can get their act back together.¹¹

Of course, we face significant institutional challenges when it comes to building trust and unit cohesion. For one, the turnover units experience over the course of their deployment lifecycle is a major inhibitor. This problem is exacerbated by a deployment-to-dwell ratio well below 1:3, which limits the time key leaders and commanders have with their units. As personnel rotate out of key billets, from the battalion staff down to the fire teams, we lose a portion of the accrued trust, collaboration, and cohesion. But fighting with a maneuver warfare mindset is not a pickup game; we must continue to aggressively pursue our PME and training programs amidst turnover, never sacrificing an opportunity to build trust and teamwork through repetition.

Naturally, no amount of PME will matter if the cohesion, trust, and decision-making ability developed in the classroom cannot be transferred to the field. Therefore, we apply the lessons learned in our professional military education sessions when our units go to the field to conduct improved field training. Some of the improvements are resource based, such as leveraging attachments, enablers, and support from across II MEF. Other resource improvements include increased instrumentation, such as the use of a small arms lethality simulator, a cognitive and human performance-focused combat training system, and artificial intelligence enabled robotic targetry designed to simulate human reactions on our livefire ranges. Some of the improvements to training are philosophical and can be implemented internal to the Division to



We must continue to focus on building unit trust and cohesion. (Photo by GySgt Leon Branchaud.)

maximize training value despite budget cuts and external constraints. These improvements include approaching the Marine Corps Combat Readiness Exercises (MCCRE) with a mindset of learning and training. We also align Regiment or Division Headquarters field and command post exercises to provide appropriate higher headquarters for multiple battalion MCCREs. This gives higher-level command and control repetitions while maximizing training value through the regimental and division levels. Harkening back to Gen Grav's introduction of large-scale, force-on-force free play exercises in the 1980s to test maneuver warfare concepts, the Division is placing renewed emphasis on force-on-force free play exercises—specifically in the execution of MCCREs.

Battalions conducting their MCREE are fighting against a peer enemy operating with mission oriented tasks under the command of a regimental headquarters in a force-on-force exercise designed to push them to their mental, physical, and tactical limits. The gold standard is a regimental headquarters commanding two battalion task forces against an adversary battalion task force composed of like capabilities, reinforced with the dedicated adversary force company. We also worked with Training and Education Command to develop better and more detailed MCCRE evaluation standards so that we can evaluate everything from basic individual continuing actions through regimental C2. These force-on-force exercises closely approximate combat situations and demand that leaders at all levels make quick decisions and tactically apply techniques and procedures against a thinking enemy in a chaotic and rapidly changing environment. They also provide immediate feedback on decisions and actions. For fiscal year 2020-2021, to capture the valuable feedback gained during these exercises, we are increasing the use of the Instrumented Tactical Engagement Simulation System II on personnel and vehicles. We are going to record more overhead aerial footage of engagements via small unmanned aerial systems (UAS) for use in our execution and after-action process. These technologies, coupled with our increased educational efforts, will allow us to close the gap between our Marines' and Sailors' mental models of the actions (what we believe occurred during the engagements) and reality (what actually occurred during force-on-force engagements). These technologies can be used to carry out deliberate on the spot debriefs with individual and unit positions and movements overlaid on an interactive digital map. Similar to the way sports teams use game film, this

footage can be used to show how missions played out and focus the debrief on both friendly and adversary small unit leader decisions and their resultant actions and counteractions. They can also be paired with the battalions' tactical decision kits when the unit returns to garrison to create interactive tactical decision games to cement lessons learned and improve small unit tactics, techniques, and procedures. Our next step is generating training as a service contract to provide a National Training Center-level training experience right at Camp Lejeune.

To get the most out of our free play exercises, however, we can no longer rely on hastily designed and cobbled together adversary forces comprised of available Marines and Sailors. Indeed, such practices pose a significant hindrance to quality, force-on-force training. Even worse, these forces are often tied to the execution of a scripted list of events to check certain predetermined "boxes" regardless of applicability to the situation. These poorly prepared or scripted adversaries limit the value of the force-on-force training by removing the friction and chaos generated by a freethinking and well-trained opponent.

To address this, the Division Combat Skills Company, formerly tasked with running Division Schools, is being reorganized and trained to serve as a dedicated adversary force for field training exercises. Once the reorganization is complete, the company will be renamed the Division Adversary Force (ADFOR) Company. The goal is to make leadership billets in the ADFOR a reward for superior performance and sought after by our best officers, SNCOs, and NCOs because of the level of influence the company has over the training of the Division. We recently coordinated with the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab and Marine Tactical Operations Group (MCTOG) to schedule Division AD-FOR training in threat emulation. During this coordination, we considered various ways to train our ADFOR in enemy capabilities similar to our own, as well as hybrid capabilities much like the ones we would see in Eastern Ukraine.

The use of a thinking, trained, and dedicated adversary force allows our

units to train against a higher level of opposition, thereby increasing our ability to find or create and exploit advantages through experiential learning. This force will also not allow our training formations to "get away" with anything and quickly identify and exploit shortfalls in a unit's discipline. A unit's failure because of a lack of discipline will only reinforce our focus on discipline in garrison. Although creating and maintaining a dedicated opposition force presents significant challenges from a manpower perspective, building the capability "out of hide" is preferable to using *ad hoc* units or waiting on institutional solutions. Ultimately, the desired end state is a level of "in-house" training capability at Camp Lejeune that mimics the capability if not the capacity of Twentynine Palms or the National Training Center.

Through all these means, we are training to fight an intelligent and capable foe that will use tactics, technology, and cunning to generate uncertainty and confusion to counter any

the impacts of these forces on command and control. Developing fingerspitzengefuhl, or "finger tips feeling," for the effects of electronic attack and being able to distinguish it from normal friction is critical.¹³ This feel only comes from sets and repetitions exercising command and control in realistic degraded or denied information environments. Both the Division's own scenario-based training, along with scenarios done in concert with MCTOG, will continue to place an emphasis on simulating the effects of adversary systems, thereby causing the Division to both identify and develop ways to overcome the resultant friction. Additionally, we can mitigate the negative effects of a degraded or denied information environment through the use of mission-type orders. Mission-type orders, long a cornerstone of maneuver warfare, specify tasks and purposes to subordinate commanders without explaining how they must do so. We enable the use of mission-type orders through the shared understanding and ability to communicate implicitly,

The use of a thinking, trained, and dedicated adversary force allows our units to train against a higher level of opposition ...

advantages we might possess. This is especially true when it comes to technology that supports command and control of our forces. Israeli historian Martin van Creveld wrote that the history of command in war is "essentially an endless quest for certainty,"¹² and an ultimately futile one at that. Although we will never operate in an environment of absolute certainty, the challenge of providing commanders with the awareness and information required for success is only heightened in a denied or degraded information environment.

There are several ways that the Division can meet these challenges while preparing to fight a peer adversary with advanced technological capabilities. First, the staff must learn to operate comfortably amidst uncertainty and friction while becoming familiar with which we will help cultivate through our training and professional military education programs. Mission-type orders coupled with an understanding of commander's intent—the enduring *purpose* of the mission—will allow subordinate commanders to continue executing and making decisions in spite of disruptions in communications.

Second, we must realize that electronic warfare and the degradation of our command and control systems is not something that we are powerless against. Currently, most training does not accurately reflect the vulnerabilities that adversaries present when they choose to jam systems or otherwise inhibit our ability to command and control. Taking into consideration that our adversaries only possess a finite number of these critical systems, and that their use produces a significant electronic signature itself that we can observe and target, the situation starts to become much less lopsided. In fact, it presents an opportunity to exploit a weakness and gain an advantage over an unsuspecting adversary. Last spring, we convened an operational planning team to address the problem of command and control in a denied or degraded environment. As a result, we are developing battle drills to respond to enemy electronic warfare actionsboth to protect our own systems and to degrade the enemy's. This is now a key component of our education program being incrementally incorporated into all our training. We are also aggressively using UAS for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets at the lowest possible level, in every training venue possible. However, our capability to counter enemy UAS surveillance is a critical capability gap. The Division has yet to field systems that allow squador platoon-sized elements to disable or destroy enemy UASs.

The organization of the staff and how the command post is physically organized is another area that, when examined with a critical eye, may present previously unforeseen opportunities to gain an advantage over an adversary. When fighting against a peer competitor, the large, static command posts that were the norm in Iraq and Afghanistan become a liability. In the fight we are preparing to win, the Division command post will have to frequently move to survive. To achieve a high degree of mobility, we cannot expect to go to war with a bulky, bureaucratic staff that produces a large physical and electromagnetic footprint. As we pursue the development of a lean and capable command element, command post exercises and training with MCTOG are helping us challenge assumptions about the traditional "Main and Forward" command post constructs. We are refining the appropriate mix of personnel and capabilities to effectively command and control our forces while also reducing our electro-magnetic signature when doing it. MCTOG's inclusion of the Division staff into a regimental command and control simulated exercise allowed us to stress-test the model of

multiple forward nodes and the aggressive implementation of a "jump" command post. The Division will continue to refine and evaluate concepts of increased flexibility and survivability throughout the execution of Servicelevel training exercises such as MAGTF Warfare Exercise 1-20 (MWX 1-20), a Division-sized force-on-force free play exercise held in November 2019 and Naval Large Scale Exercise 20 in the spring of 2020.

A peer-to-peer fight is coming. We may not know when, but 2d Marine Division is not wasting any time preparing. We started our preparations with a deliberate focus on integrating maneuver warfare and our capstone doctrine into the way we train and educate our Marines and Sailors as well as how we will lead the Division in combat. Our training and education begins with the discipline and lethality of our key strength: the Division's 243 rifle squads. Our discipline and lethality must be developed in peace time and become habit of action prior to the first round being fired in the next conflict. A deliberate focus on the professionalization of our NCOs will allow us conduct tough and realistic training and challenging education at and above the company-level to prepare our units to fight war on a scale not seen in decades while in a degraded or denied communications environment. We will succeed in this environment based on our ability to generate tempo through discipline, unit cohesion, mutual trust, implicit communication, and increased small unit lethality. Our discipline must also carry over into how we manage our physical and electromagnetic signals. In the coming month, we will test the mettle of these efforts against a thinking enemy at MWX 1-20. Undoubtedly, we will suffer setbacks and challenges at the hands of our adversary. But as we have done for the past year, we will integrate these lessons learned into future training and education efforts and emerge stronger and more ready for the coming fight. "Follow Me."

2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, War-fighting*, (Washington, DC: June 1997).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. Emphasis in original.

7. In this use, continuing actions refer to those common, sustained, or implied tasks that are generally inherent to the tactical task or operation in question. For example, communications, camouflage, security, etc.

8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, (Washington, DC: April 2018). This is the subordinate's role in earning trust from their leaders.

9. Dr. Kevin Benson (COL, USA (Ret) previously served as Lead Red Teaming Instructor at the U.S. Army's University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies and as Director of the School of Advanced Military Studies, (SAMS) at Fort Leavenworth, KS. Additionally, LTG Leonard D. Holder, Jr., USA(Ret), Commander of the 2d ACR at the Battle of the 73 Easting; BGen Louis "Bill" Weber, USA(Ret), former OpsO of 3d Squadron, 2d ACR; and COL Gregory Fontenot, USA(Ret), former CO of 2-34 Armor called in to give their perspectives and insights on the battle.

10. For reading on John Schmitt and Gary Klein's Recognitional Planning Model see: John F. Schmitt and Gary A. Klein, "A Recognitional Planning Model," *Proceedings, Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium,* (Newport, RI: 1999); and Karol G. Ross, et al., "The Recognition-Primed Decision Model," *Military Review,* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, July 2004).

11. Jasonmbro, "John Boyd Patterns of Conflict Part 11," YouTube video, 27:31, (Online: February 2015), available at https://www.youtube.com.

12. Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

13. A better explanation of *fingerspitzengefuhl* is available at https://slightlyeastofnew.com.

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Notes

^{1.} The Infantry Journal Inc., "Infantry In Battle," (Richmond, VA: Garret and Massie, 1939).